DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 329 301 JC 910 119

TITLE Wyoming Community College Commission Statewide Longitudinal Study Annual Report, 1989-90.
INSTITUTION Wyoming Community Coll. Commission, Cheyenne.
PUB DATE 90
NOTE 12p.; For a related report, see ED 291 433.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Achievement; Career Choice; Community Colleges; Education Work Relationship; Followup Studies; Longitudinal Studies; *Participant Satisfaction; School Surveys; *Self Concept; Student Attitudes; *Student Characteristics; *Student Development; *Student Educational Objectives; Student Employment; Two Year Colleges; *Two Year College Students
IDENTIFIERS *Wyoming

ABSTRACT

A study was conducted by the Wyoming Community College Commission to describe the variables that affect students' progress toward their personal, academic and career objectives, and to evaluate their progress in reaching those objectives. The 5-year longitudinal study focused on a random sample of 181 students who were first-time, first-year attendees at one of the seven Wyoming community college campuses in fall 1987. An initial survey was conducted in 1987 to profile the students and identify their educational and career goals. The study design then called for follow-up surveys to be conducted every 6 months over the next 5 years. This report presents results from 1989-90, the third year of the study. Highlighted findings include the following: (1) among the 20% of the respondents who changed their marital status since 1987, 77% had married and 23% had separated or divorced; (2) when asked to rate their competency relative to selected skills and abilities, 58% rated themselves as average, while 31% rated their skills and abilities as superior; (3) 70% of the respondents were satisfied with their growth in skills and abilities since enrolling, 77% were satisfied with their personal growth, and 61% were satisfied with their progress toward achieving their educational and career goals; (4) 59% of the respondents were still enrolled in institutions of higher education, with 42% of this group at two-year colleges and 54% at four-year institutions; (5) 63% of the respondents were working full- or part-time, though only 31% were working in their chosen career field; and (6) 80% of the respondents reported being satisfied with the education they had received at their community college. (JMC)

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STATEWIDE LONGITUDINAL STUDY

WYOMING COMMUNITY COLLEGE COMMISSION

Annual Report

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STATEWIDE LONGITUDINAL STUDY

1989-90 ANNUAL REPORT

INTRODUCTION

To effectively plan for today and for the future, it is essential that the Wyoming Community College System maintain a broad data base. An essential component of that base is a thorough, accurate and useful description of the variables that affect student progress toward their personal, academic and career objectives. Equally important is an evaluation of students' progress in reaching those objectives.

To provide the essential component, the Wyoming Community College Commission, in cooperation with the seven community colleges, implemented a comprehensive statewide longitudinal study in the fall of 1987. The study is scheduled for completion in 1992.

The sample for the study consists of one-hundred-eighty-one (181) randomly selected first-time, first-year students attending one of the seven community colleges in Wyoming. Each respondent completed an initial survey questionnaire administered by the Commission Researcher during the week, October 19-23, 1987. The purpose of the initial survey was to define a profile of community college students and identify their educational and career goals. Follow-up surveys are scheduled for each six-month period during the five-year study. Each survey samples certain elements within the two categories defined above.

The first three years of the study have been completed as scheduled. Findings from the third year are discussed in the 1989-90 Annual Report.

STUDENT PROFILE

Student Characteristics--Status Changes:

During the initial survey, respondents were identified by marital and parental status. At that time, seventy-five

percent (75%) of the students surveyed had never been married, fourteen percent (14%) were currently married and the remaining eleven percent (11%) were separated, divorced or widowed. By the conclusion of the 1989-90 academic year or the third year of the five-year study, eighty percent (80%) of the respondents reported that there had been no change in their marital status and the remaining twenty percent (20%) reported a change. For those reporting a change, seventy-seven percent (77%) had married, eight percent (8%) had separated and fifteen percent (15%) had divorced.

At the beginning of the study, twenty four percent (24%) of the sample reported that they had children while seventy-six percent (76%) did not. The number of children varied as follows: one child, thirty-seven percent (37%); two children, twenty-four percent (24%); three children, twenty-two percent (22%); and, four or more children, seventeen percent (17%).

During the first three years of the study the parental status had remained the same for eighty-nine percent (89%) of respondents while eleven percent (11%) reported a change. The change in each case was the birth of a child.

Student Characteristics--Perceptions:

Students were requested during the year to report their perceptions relative to their perceived competency in selected skills and abilities and to rate their satisfaction level with the growth and development of those skills and abilities; to rate their satisfaction level with their personal growth and development and their progress toward achievement of their educational and career goals; and, to rate their satisfaction level with the community college they attended. They were also asked to identify strengths and areas most in need of improvement for the community college they attended.

When respondents were asked to rate their competency relative to selected skills and abilities--one, needs improvement; two, average; and three, superior--the greatest percent, fifty-eight (58%) rated their skills and abilities as average. Thirty-one percent (31%) rated their skills and abilities as superior and the remaining eleven percent (11%) perceived that their personal skills and abilities were in need of improvement. TABLE I defines the composite rating for each identified skill or ability.

TABLE I

PERCEPTIONS
PERSONAL SKILLS/ABILITIES COMPETENCY
WYOMING COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS
1989-90

SKILL/ABILITY	NEEDS IMPROVEMENT	AVERAGE	SUPERIOR
STUDY SKILLS	18%	69%	13%
ORGANIZATION SKILLS	8%	57%	35%
READING SKILLS	9%	53%	38%
WRITING SKILLS	5%	68%	27%
MATHEMATICAL SKILLS	26%	49%	25%
TEST TAKING SKILLS	14%	65%	21%
ABILITY TO CONCENTRATE	12%	64%	24%
DECISION MAKING ABILITY	6%	54%	40%
REASONING ABILITY	2%	54%	44%
SELF CONFIDENCE	11%	52%	37%
MEAN	11%	58%	31%

After rating their skills and abilities competency, respondents were asked to define how satisfied they were relative to their growth and development in the identified skills and abilities areas since they first enrolled at a community college in the fall of 1987. Seventy percent (70%) of the sample indicated that they were satisfied with the progress they had made in improving their skills and abilities. Twenty-five percent (25%) reported that they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with their growth and development in the selected skills and abilities areas. The remaining five percent (5%) expressed dissatisfaction with the growth and development of their skills and abilities during the three year interval.

Respondents were asked to rate their satisfaction level with their personal growth and development since the study began. Over three-fourths of the sample (77%) was satisfied with their personal growth and development while seventeen percent (17%) expressed neither satisfaction nor dissatisfaction with their personal growth and development. The remaining six percent (6%) reported that they were dissatisfied with the personal growth and development they had achieved since first enrolling at the community college in the Fall of 1987.

Each respondent identified his/her satisfaction level with the overall progress made in attaining educational and/or career goals. Sixty-one percent (61%) reported they were satisfied with the progress they were making. Twenty percent (20%) were neutral relative to the progress they were making in achieving their educational and career goals while the remaining nineteen percent (19%) were dissatisfied with the progress they had made during the three year period.

The final student perception to be recorded was the satisfaction level relative to the education received at the community college attended. Eighty percent (80%) of the respondents reported that they were satisfied with the education they received at their community college. An additional seventeen percent (17%) expressed neither satisfaction nor dissatisfaction and the remaining three percent (3%) were dissatisfied with the education provided at the community college.

Respondents were asked to respond to an open-ended question ... "In what area do you feel the community college you attended is strongest?" The responses were categorized and are summarized below:

COMMUNITY COLLEGE STRENGTHS

Positive Faculty-Student Interaction	49%
Personal Attention to Students	21%
Availability of Quality Classes	17%
Cooperation	7%
Other	6%

When asked to respond to a second open-ended question ... "In what area do you feel the college you attended is most in need of improvement?" the students recorded the following:

AREAS NEEDING IMPROVEMENT AT COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Class Variety	35%
Counseling and Advising	18%
Facilities	17%
Social Interaction	10%
Quality of Instructors	8%
Personal Interaction	8%
Financial Aid	4%

EDUCATIONAL STATUS AND PLANS

Respondents were asked to indicate if they were currently enrolled at a postsecondary institution. If the answer was affirmative they were asked to identify the name and location of the institution. Fifty-nine percent (59%) of the sample was enrolled in an institution of higher education three years after the onset of the study. The remaining forty-one percent (41%) reported that they were not currently enrolled in an educational program. Of those currently enrolled, the institutions that they attended were dichotomized by level of instruction and by in-state and out-of state. The results are detailed in **TABLE II**.

TABLE II

CURRENT EDUCATIONAL STATUS
WYOMING COMMUNITY COLLEGE COMMISSION
1989-90

	LOCATION		
INSTITUTION	IN-STATE	OUT-STATE	TOTAL
2-YEAR	37%	5%	42%
4-YEAR	28%	30%	58%
TOTAL	65%	35%	100%

Eighty-two percent of the currently enrolled students were registered as full time students. Their average credit hour load was 15.4 credits hours per semester. The remaining eighteen percent of the currently enrolled students were registered part time and averaged 6.5 credit hours.

The follow-up surveys revealed that of those students currently enrolled in a postsecondary education institution, thirty-six percent (36%) had earned or would earn by the end of the semester an associate degree. An additional three percent (3%) had earned or would earn by the end of the semester, a vocational certificate. When asked to respond to the degree seeking level at which they were enrolled, fifty-eight percent (58%) indicated that they were enrolled in a degree program beyond the associate level while forty-two percent (42%) gave a negative response indicating they were still working below the associate level.

To discern current affiliation with community colleges, the respondents were asked to identify any contact that they had with the community college in which they enrolled in the fall of 1987. Fifty-seven percent (57%) answered in the affirmative while forty-three percent (43%) reported that they had no contact with the community college. The positive answers were nearly evenly divided with twenty-eight percent (28%) associated with the college as a student and twenty-nine percent (29%) in another capacity. Other capacities identified were: placement and transfer services; friends, faculty and student visits; enrolled in UW/CC program; club member, sibling student, the Alumni News; enrolled in community services class; working for the college; and, as a prospective student.

The final response in the educational status and plans category was to the question, "Which of the following best describes your plans for Fall, 1990?" The responses are categorized below:

Plans for Fall, 1990

To continue my studies at a community college	15%
To attend a four year institution	46%
To begin or continue in my chosen career	16%
To work before deciding future plans	9%
Take time off before deciding future plans	2%
Take care of my home and family	0%
Other	12%

Those who planned to attend a four-year institution were asked to identify the institution. The respondents were nearly evenly divided between those who planned to enroll at the University of Wyoming (46%) and those who chose an out-of-state four-year institution (54%). There were no preferred institutions selected by those planning to attend out-of-state institutions. Twenty-nine (29) respondents who named an institution identified twenty-four (24) different institutions in fifteen (15) states.

Respondents indicating that they would be working in their chosen career field presented a wide variety of career fields. For those students who listed a career field, two students reported they would be working in each of the following fields: radiological technology, electrons technology and nursing. The remaining students identified chosen career fields as follows: court clerk, petroleum consultant, cosmetologist, law enforcement, photo lab technician, counselor for the handicapped, medical records technology, office management and psychology.

A variety of descriptions of what they plan to do in the fall of 1990 was provided by those who responded to the category, other. Two students reported that they would be serving as missionaries for their church; another two planned to work and attend night classes and two were moving out-of-state. Additional plans identified were traveling in Europe, working to get funds to return to school, using the degree earned to work to provide for family, substitute teaching, attending a vo-tech center and joining the navy.

CAREER STATUS AND PLANS

The following responses were received to the question, "What is your current employment status?"

Employment Status, 1990

Working full-time (30 Or more hours per week)	36%
Working part-time (Less than 30 hours per week)	27%
Unemployed, looking for work	8%
Not employed, not looking for work	16%
Other	13%

Nearly two-thirds of all respondents were employed either full-time or part-time. Thirty-six percent (36%) of those

responding reported that they worked full-time which was defined as thirty hours or more per week. An additional twenty-seven percent (27%) reported that they worked part-time defined as less than thirty hours per week. Eight percent (8%) were unemployed but looking for work while sixteen percent (16%) were not employed but they were not looking for work. The final thirteen percent (13%) of the respondents who indicated their situation did not fit into the aforementioned categories reported poor health, self-employment, ranching, resident hall advising, temporary jobs and basic training in the national guard to describe their career status.

A series of questions was posed to those students who were employed. When asked if they were currently working in a career or occupation that was their long term goal, thirty-one percent (31%) answered in the affirmative while sixty-nine percent (69%) gave a negative response. When asked to respond to the length of time they expected to be employed in their current position, forty percent (40%) responded less than one year. A nearly equal amount, thirty-nine percent (39%) responded that they expected to work in their current job for one to five years. Only four percent (4%) expressed that they would be in their current position for five to ten years and the remaining seventeen percent (17%) expected to hold their current position for more than ten years.

To determine the relationship between the community college experience and the current career status of the respondents, each was asked to respond to the question, "Did your community college experience prepare you for your current employment. The responses were evenly divided with fifty percent (50%) answering in the affirmative and fifty percent (50%) responding in the negative.

Finally, in the career status and plans section of the surveys conducted during the 1989-90 academic year, the respondents identified their current salary range. The results of the identification are list in **TABLE III**.

TABLE III

ANNUAL SALARY RANGE
LONGITUDINAL STUDY SUBJECTS
1989-90

SALARY RANGE	% SUBJECTS
< $7500	52%
$7500-$11,999	24%
$12,000-15,000	14%
> $15,000	11%

SUMMARY

Surveys conducted during the 1989-90 academic year or the third year of the study explored certain student characteristics as they relate to the student profile. The results of the survey year revealed minimal change in the marital and parental status of the respondents. Of those reporting changes in marital status, approximately three-fourths had married while one-fourth had separated or divorced. Eleven percent reported a change in parental status which in each case was the birth of a child.

The surveys also assessed respondent progress toward and satisfaction with attaining educational and career goals. Generally, respondents exhibited a high level of self-esteem relative to their skills and abilities in selected categories. Fifty-eight percent (58%) perceived that their skills and abilities were average and an additional thirty-one percent (31%) perceived that their skills and abilities were superior. Also expressed was a positive satisfaction level with growth and development of skills and abilities during the three year period. Seventy percent (70%) of the respondents were satisfied with the growth in their skills and abilities.

Two additional satisfaction levels categories were explored. Seventy-seven percent (77%) of the respondents reported that they were satisfied with the progress they were making in achieving their personal goals. Sixty one percent (61%) of the respondents expressed satisfaction with progress toward achieving their educational and career goals.

More than half of the sample (59%) were currently enrolled in institutions of higher education. Of those enrolled, forty-two percent (42%) were studying at two-year institutions. The remaining fifty-four percent (54%) were enrolled at a four-year institution. The majority of the respondents enrolled in higher education institutions (65%) were at an institution in Wyoming while the remaining thirty-five percent (35%) were studying at an institution in another state. When asked to indicate their plans for fall, 1990, sixty-one percent (61%) responded that they would be enrolling at a higher education institution.

Sixty-three percent of the respondents reported that they were working either full-time or part-time. Of those working, only thirty-one percent (31%) was employed in their chosen career field. The expectation of seventy-nine percent (79%) of the respondents was that they would leave their current field of employment within five years. The salary range reported by seventy-six percent (76%) of the respondents was less than $12,000 per year.

Generally, respondents expressed a positive attitude toward the community college they had attended. Eighty percent (80%) reported that they were satisfied with the education they had received at the community college they attended. Fifty percent (50%) of the respondents who were employed reported that the community college experience had prepared them for their employment. Fifty-seven percent of the respondents identified contacts they currently have with the community college they first attended.

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